

By Aida Rogers

Abbeville

There's an old church in Abbeville, with a wonderful stained glass window that legend says was transported here after a blockade-runner brought it ashore in Charleston. Its 125-foot spire slices into the sky, a graceful landmark that exudes a sense of well being over the 7,000 souls who call Abbeville home. This is Trinity Episcopal, "the pink church" where many of its members died in the Civil War not long after its consecration in 1860.

Wander in on a Saturday afternoon, and chances are you'll catch the organist rehearsing for a wedding that evening. You can slide into the original, handmade pews and enjoy an unplanned concert while the sun pours through the glorious chancel window, made in England. For the nuptial couple, soon to stand before that window and make vows for eternity, bloodshed and blockade-runners will be far away. And they are, because life has gone on in this "Birthplace and Deathbed of the Confederacy." Though secession reputedly began here, and Jefferson Davis held his last War Council meeting here, Abbeville has had many lives since then. Cultural oasis, textile town, govern-

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When to visit? Spring is never bad. Come in mid-April and observe that giddy rite of passage: Prom Night. In the late afternoon, nervous teens in tuxedos and sequins gather in the square while their smiling parents take pictures. Or try the first weekend in May for the Abbeville Spring Festival. Besides arts, crafts and a street dance, you can take in the tour of homes. Abbeville has no shortage of grand ones, especially on scenic North Main Street. Nor does it have a shortage of restaurants and shops. There are several on the square, where you can take a break with a cold drink or ice cream cone.

Besides its Confederate past and 300-structure Historic District, Abbeville is most known for its 1908 Opera House. Fanny Brice and Sarah Bernhardt performed here, stepping off the train and spending the night in the now century-old Eureka Inn. The Eureka now is The Belmont, recently restored with 26 rooms, a fine restaurant and large veranda. The Opera House has been restored too, and its scarlet-and-gold interior, with old-fashioned box seats, draws theater lovers from several states.

Not quite as elegant but every bit as authentic is The Rough House, also on the square. This 72-year-old institution has three pool tables, "the world's best hot dogs" and those tiny Cokes in the glass bottle. That Coke will set you back a dollar, but there's no price tag for sitting at the counter, eating a "Rough Dog" and chatting with barkeep Tony Roper about his life as a musician in London's Tin Pan Alley. He worked with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks and others. If you're lucky, he'll pull out his guitar and flute and a free, impromptu concert is yours.

You weren't expecting that, but gosh, aren't you glad it happened?

Find out more...

Trinity Episcopal Church of Abbeville
www.emraldis.com/abbeville/history/tours.html
 864-366-5186

Abbeville Chamber of Commerce
www.abbevillescchamber.com
 864-366-4600

Abbeville Opera House
www.emraldis.com/abbeville
 864-366-2157

